

AIRPOWER IN THE ADEN PROTECTORATE

by *289*

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# PREFACE

Since the end of the 1939-1945 World War, Britain's presence on the land area of the Middle East has been steadily reduced. By studying the military techniques, the how of British presence in South Arabia, rather than the political why of that presence, it is hoped that certain lessons might be derived that will act as keys to any study of such security operations in the area. An attempt has been made to limit the considerations solely to the area of South Arabia.

However, descriptions of military actions which involve the expenditure of wealth and manpower, can never attain the dignity of history unless larger political and social factors are weighed in the balance as well. Military operations do not exist in a vacuum. The affects of outmoded military techniques and thinking are usually, though not always, fatal. Such shortcomings are evident in the South Arabian operations studied, though each campaign was properly considered successful. The British position deteriorated because of ideological and nationalistic pressures, and not because of military impotence. The very successes that failed to maintain an imperial power in South Arabia are worthy of study if future events in the newly independent states are to be fully interpreted. It is hoped that this report will point up, not only areas for further research, but some of the basic facts of the situation in South Arabia.

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## I. SOUTH ARABIA

The last five hundred years have to a great extent been the story of the spread of European imperialism to Asia, Africa and the Americas. Only in the twentieth century has the tide begun to recede. Indeed it has only been since the close of the 1939-1945 World War that independent nations have started to replace the Empires of the Europeans. As a result, the problems that men face in this century are to a large part determined by the incomplete Europeanization of most of the globe in preceding centuries.

Between Europe and Asia a geographic link is formed by the Middle East. In the great age of nineteenth century imperialism, Britain, the world's most active imperial power, came to view the Middle East as the quickest route to her holdings in South Asia. Accordingly, Britain readily replaced the Ottoman Turks as the greatest land power in the Middle East in order to protect the routes to India. The great oil reserves of the Middle East, centered around the Persian Gulf, gave the area a direct and enlarged importance in the strategic thinking of the European powers. Britain was not slow in assuring herself the lion's share of the oil that fed the industries and military machines of the great powers. In the last twenty years the rising tide of Arab nationalism has diminished the physical presence of Britain in the area to the extent that she must now depend on the good will and friendship of certain Middle Eastern nations to make her influence felt. A direct British presence is maintained only in the small states of South Arabia and the Persian Gulf, where British armed forces and political advisors

fulfil her treaty obligations as a Protecting Power.

The era of the old-style imperialism is ending, and the localisation of the last vestiges of British power in these vital areas of the Middle East has given them still more importance in the global strategy of the West. The passages through Suez and the Red Sea and to the oil of the Persian Gulf are still of great importance in the last half of the twentieth century. No new western enclaves can be expected in the area, so developments in the last few British holdings have taken on added significance. Thus, while South Arabia is important as a base on the road to Asia, the fact that it flanks both the oil regions of the Persian Gulf and the Suez Canal gives it a strategic rank nearly as high as either.

Maps of South Arabia show that several small states are spread around the wrinkled surface of the southern rim of the Arabian peninsula. Inland, the northern and central parts of the peninsula are filled by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The boundaries of the South Arabian states with Saudi Arabia and with each other are shown on maps to be rather inexact, a fact which both mirrors the heritage of the area and expresses the many contemporary political problems to be found there. It is probably Yemen, on the Red Sea, that is the least changed of the states, and the least influenced by the British. Next would come Muscat and Oman, where the British and others have begun to make themselves felt with twentieth-century oil rigs and a few political advisors. Northwest of the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman the proven oil country begins with the British-protected sheikhdoms of the Trucial Coast, which fronts on

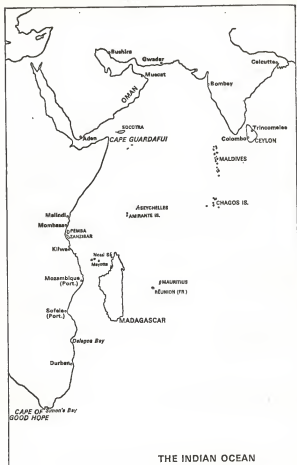


Fig. 1. The Indian Ocean



Fig. 2. Naval bases used by the Royal Navy in the nineteenth century



both the Gulf of Oman and the Persian Gulf (which zealous nationalists have now renamed the Arab Gulf). Here British power has been felt since the mid-nineteenth century.

Earlier, during the Napoleonic Wars, the British had temporarily established themselves at Aden, on the southern coast between Yemen and Oman. After a post-war withdrawal, they returned in 1839. Soon the port of Aden was a British Colony, the most important base between Suez and India. To safeguard the landward approaches to the Colony the British entered into agreements with the petty feudal lords of Southern Yemen and the Hadramaut coastal chain. Trade had only slightly exposed the tribes to the outside world; politics continued to follow the feudal pattern. The old ways of life have been very slow to change under the impact of the British and the modern world. Boundaries have tended to crystallize, and with them the relations between the tiny familial states and the rest of their environment. By a process of pushing and shoving the buffer areas have largely disappeared and boundaries are fast becoming the province of nations rather than local sheikhs. The development of these states must now be looked at in turn.

#### 1. Yemen

Yemen is properly a geographic term--al-Yemen--the Yemen, which refers to both the Red Sea littoral south of the Hijaz and to the interior mountain range running south to Aden. These mountains are provided with adequate rainfall for the most part, and have the most temperate and pleasant climate in Arabia. The Tihama coastal zone is at

the other extreme.

British traders were present in the port of Moche as early as 1609, but it was to be the Ottoman Turks who played the role of imperialists in Yemen from 1517 to 1918. The Turkish hold on the highlands was never secure, and it was only in the last decades of their hegemony that they affectively occupied the coast. In 1911, a revolt caused the Turks to give up attempts to administer the interior. Leader of this movement was the Imam, a religious and secular leader of the Zaidis, a moderate wing of the non-orthodox Shia Muslims. Traditionally, the Zaidis have been the ruling minority in the highlands of the Yemen. The successful rebel, the Imam Yahya, gained strength after the Turks withdrew in 1918, and ruled for thirty years. He beat back a rival, British-backed claimant from the northern state of Asir, vigorously opposing the influence of the Saudis in the North as well as that of the British from Aden in the south. Ibn Saud lost patience and, in a show of power, conquered Yemen in 1934. Quieting the Imam by graciously returning Yemen to his hands, the Saudi then withdrew to face other problems.

In the British-protected Emirates to the south of Yemen fighting was sporadic, reaching its greatest extent in the years 1925-1928. British forces finally succeeded in turning back the Imam's incursions. In 1934, a peace treaty was signed in which the British recognized the independence of the Kingdom of Yemen. Both sides promised to maintain the status quo. In future years each party was to give their own interpretation to this phrase and the conflict was to begin anew.

The Imam Ahmad (1948-1962) relieved the isolation of Yemen somewhat, though he remained a tough, feudal ruler. His predecessor had courted Italian influence as a counterweight to the British. Now Ahmad joined the Arab League, cautiously leading his state into union with more modern Egypt and Syria in the United Arab Republic (UAR). Aid was accepted from both the United States and Communist countries. Having crushed the 1948 revolt that killed his father, Ahmad put down rebellions in 1955 and 1961. Before the Turks and the British consolidated their presence, the Imams had ruled, briefly, the whole of al-Yemen, and the Imam Ahmad repeatedly sought to dislodge the British from the Western Aden Protectorate. After being wounded in the 1961 uprising, Ahmad's health declined. He died in September of 1962.

His son, Mohammed el-Badr, was Imam for one week. Much influenced by the example of Egypt's President Nasser, Badr had travelled in search of foreign aid to Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. He was thought to be reform-minded. However, he was to have little chance to prove himself, as he was quickly deposed in an army coup led by one Colonel Sallal and directly supported by the Egyptians. Badr managed an escape into the mountains, where he rallied tribal support. The army rebels meanwhile set up a Republic, which was recognized by several nations--including the Soviet Union and the United States--and which retained Yemen's seat in the United Nations. The Imam's forces continued to control much of the interior. His government retained the recognition of Britain and several other nations. Saudi Arabia gave direct support to the Imam's cause and it is likely that some aid also came from the

British. The Republic, on the other hand, received considerable technical aid from Communist sources and was effectively occupied by Egyptian advisors and the Egyptian army.

The Yemen is in a position to dominate the Red Sea. As the most fertile area in Arabia, it contains almost half of the peninsula's 10,000,000 people. The modernizing influence of the UAR-inspired Republic has not yet changed the basic pattern of life, a pattern common to all Arabia until very recently. The seemingly chaotic feudalism of the Arabs is in fact extreme local democracy. Unification into something like a modern European nation-state has only come to the Yemen, for example, in this century. Chaos has been the normal state of al-Yemen<sup>1</sup> and of all South Arabia. The extreme individualism of the Arabs produced hundreds of medieval, feudal entities. Still, the Yemenis, who have traditionally emigrated from their populous valleys, have maintained an identity, a kinship. Only in the last few decades have attempts been made to express relationships in Arabia in the terms of European nation-states. As with the ideal of Arab unity, the development is something less than complete.

## 2. Aden

The South Arabian Federation and the South Arabian Protectorate evolved from the position gained by the British in the port of Aden. In 1839, after a wrecked ship under the British flag had been plundered,

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<sup>1</sup>Harold Ingrams, The Yemen: Imams, Rulers, and Revolutions. New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1963, p. 4.



an Indian Navy detachment under British officers took Aden. After Mucelle and Socotre had been investigated, Aden was made a primary coaling station for the Royal Navy.<sup>2</sup>

The Protectorate was formed between 1882 and 1914, when twenty-three small arab amirates entered into protective treaties with Britain. The Governor of Aden Colony became Governor of the Protectorate as well. Until 1937, administration was handled by the Governor of India in Council; then, by a Governor who also served as Commander-in-Chief, and who was assisted by an Executive Council. Crown Colony status was granted in 1935. Twenty-four years later a Legislative Council of twenty-three members (including twelve who were elected) became a reality.<sup>3</sup>

In the early 1950's, discussions were held to consider the federation of protected states, and in 1959 six states--Audhali, Lower Yafe, Fedhli, Dhale, Beihan, and Upper Aulaqi--signed a Federal Constitution and Treaty of Friendship and Protection with Britain. This Federation of Amirates was joined by Lahej in October of 1959, and by Lower Aulaqi, Aqrabi and Dethina (February, 1960). The Wahidi states of Belhaf and Bir Ali, both from the Eastern Protectorate, followed suit in 1962. One year later, Haushabi, Sheib, and the important Aden Colony were accepted as members.<sup>4</sup> The remaining states of the Eastern Protectorate--the Quaiti

<sup>2</sup>D. C. Wett, "The Arabian Peninsula in British Strategy," Military Review. XLI:2 (February, 1961), p. 38; hereinafter cited as Wett.

<sup>3</sup>The Middle East and North Africa, 1964-1965. London: Europe Publications, Ltd., 1964; hereinafter cited as ME.

<sup>4</sup>ME, p. 67.

of Shihr and Mukalla, the Mahra Sultanate of Qishn and Socotre, and the Sheikhdoms of Irqa and Haura--are now part of the South Arabian Protectorate. The promoters of the Federation hope that they will soon follow their neighbors, and make the federal creation complete.<sup>5</sup>

Moving from al-Yemen towards the Gulf of Oman, the country becomes much less fertile and prosperous. The Federation and Protectorate are estimated to support between 300,000 and 400,000 farmers and nomads. Fishing, and some trading are found along the narrow coastal strip. The coastal range of the Hadramaut and the great inland valley, the Wadi Hadramaut, parallel the coast until they turn to meet the sea near the eastern border of the Protectorate. This eastern part of the Protectorate lacks only sufficient rainfall to be productive. Irrigation by cisterns dates back many centuries in the Hadramaut, but regular droughts prevent consistent cultivation of crops. As it is, the best land and most plentiful rainfall is to be found in the valleys north of Aden, especially around Lahaj. Blocked by the deserts and the Saudis to the north, many Yemenis have come to live and work in this area. However, Aden town itself averages but 5 inches of rainfall annually, and in the protected areas the land suited for agriculture totals less than 10 percent of the whole.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>ME, p. 67.

<sup>6</sup>ME, p. 65.

### 3. Muscat and Oman

Oman, controlled by the Sultan of Muscat, occupies the southeastern tip of the Arabian peninsula. The topography is similar to that of Yemen, with a mountainous interior and a low-lying coastal belt; the Omani climate is much less benign. Generally, it is an area both hot and dry, producing only a few commodities, though showing some promise for oil exploration. Slavery and piracy have yet to disappear, and the present line of Sultans, dating back to 1743, has traditionally been tied to East Africa. Portuguese occupation of the area was brief. The British came into the Gulf of Oman and the Persian Gulf in an attempt to establish trade. They found that piracy had first to be suppressed. The links between Britain and the Sultanate have been as exclusive as they have been informal. Treaties of Friendship and Commerce were signed in 1891, 1939, and 1951.<sup>7</sup>

The Sultan of Muscat has traditionally controlled the sea approaches to his part of the peninsula. The Omani interior has been at times under the nominal rule of an Imam, who closely resembled his counterpart in Yemen in that he combined religious and secular leadership in his person.

In 1793, a junior line of the Imamate split off to become the Sultans of Muscat. The mysterious Treaty of Sib, signed by the Imam and Sultan in 1920, is the only formal declaration made of their positions in respect to each other. It is believed that the Sultan allowed the Imam, residing at Nizwa, in one of the few productive areas of Oman, to retain his

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<sup>7</sup>ME, p. 439.



position of power in the interior.<sup>8</sup> After many years of harmony between the two offices, the Imam Ghalib (1954- ) attempted to gain foreign, especially Saudi, support for the formation of a separate state. In December of 1955 the Sultan sent his forces into the interior, causing Ghalib to give up his plans and go into retirement. Ghalib's brother, the ambitious Talib, escaped to gain Saudi and Egyptian support.

#### 4. The Trucial Coast and Britain

North of Muscat and Oman lie the Trucial States, with a population slightly in excess of 100,000. There are seven of these states: Sharjah, Ras el Khaimah, Umm el Quwain, Ajman, Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Fujairah--tiny entities that have evolved from the sheikdoms with which the British signed a Treaty of Maritime Peace in Perpetuity in May, 1853, thus giving the area its name. In 1892, Britain acted to forestall moves by the other Great Powers in the area, signing an exclusive treaty that reinforced the 1853 protection.<sup>9</sup>

Subsequent agreements gave Britain the power to fix boundaries and to settle internal disputes. To police the states and fight the slave trade the British in 1952 created the Trucial Oman Scouts (TOS), an Arab force led by British officers and NCO's. In the same year the Saudis backed their claim to the oil-rich Bureimi Basin, in Abu Dhabi state, by sending in an occupation force. Three years later, the British used the

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<sup>8</sup>The Times (London), August 6, 1957, p. 4; also, The Times (London), August 19, 1957, p. 8; this newspaper hereinafter cited as LT.

<sup>9</sup>ME, p. 461.

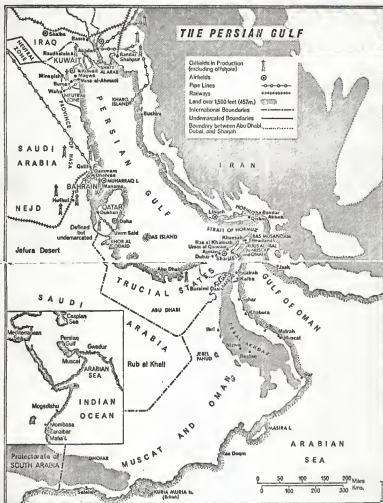


Fig. 4. The Persian Gulf

Scouts to retake Bureimi and secure the area. Following the Saudi pattern, foreign probes into sketchily demarcated border areas have been a persistent problem for British military planners. These attacks, or threats of attack, have most often been made by Yemen against the Protectorate. However, elsewhere in the world the British, in Kuwait (1961) and Malaysia (1964), have countered similar situations.

Two further types of operations have been undertaken in South Arabia. First, there have been those garrison actions against local malcontents within the protected states, a seemingly endless task in a land peopled by volatile and combative tribesmen, who can always find reason for opposing the authorities. In recent years, this problem has been intensified as anti-imperialist propaganda which has reached the tribes of South Arabia.

In addition, a third problem has appeared alongside the first two: the rebellion within protected areas in which weapons and even trained leadership are provided by a foreign power. The clearest example of this type of action came in the Saudi-inspired rebellion in Oman during 1957-1959. The British operations in the Radfan mountains north of Aden in 1964 were against a problem of this class.

## II. POLICING THE PROTECTORATE

### 1. The Royal Air Force

After the 1914-1918 World War the British began to look for the most economical method with which to control and police their extensive holdings

in the Middle East as well as the tribal frontiers of India. They settled on a combination of local levy forces led by Britons and aircraft of the Royal Air Force (RAF). When necessary these were supplemented with ground forces from the strategic reserve held in India. With the loss of the subcontinent these reserves were moved to Suez and Africa, then Cyprus and finally Britain itself.

In South Arabia the tasks of policing and garrisoning the protected areas continued under RAF command, even after substantial British ground forces were added during the 1950's. Until that time the task of securing law and order in the Protectorate rested solely with the RAF,<sup>10</sup> which provided close air support, supplies, and officers for the Aden Protectorate Levies, a force dating from 1925. A policy of collective punishment was more or less standard when dealing with renegades harbored by the various hill tribes. Aircraft were used alone or with the Levies to chastise tribal groups whenever they indulged in evasion of taxes, sniping at Levies, or similar offenses. Targets for air strikes were few. Large concentrations of tribesmen were seldom caught in the open. However, in South Arabia at least, punitive strikes, inevitably preceded by warning leaflets, were often made on tribal huts and forts. These structures were often sturdy, well-made affairs in which the tribesmen took personal pride. But more important than any damage inflicted seems to have been the psychological effect of selective, controlled air attack. The leaflets and the aircraft, especially the spectacular, rocket-firing

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<sup>10</sup>LT, July 2, 1955, p. 6.

jets of recent years, served to point up the power and resources of the government, as well as its determination to back them up with loyal ground units if necessary. This symbolic threat to use modern infantry seems to have been important. Also, the display of modern aircraft, while it committed few men to a troubled area, apparently served in many cases to save face for those tribesmen who were tired of fighting and willing to give themselves up. They could always plead that they were obviously and hopelessly outclassed by the potent weapons of the government.

A few examples will suffice to show the nature of peacekeeping within the Protectorate. Even in "normal" times, when no foreign agitation was prominent, it was a tough, exacting job. Based in tiny Beau Geste forts which dotted the tribal areas, the British-led Levies carried most of the burden. Without the communications and supplies provided by RAF pilots flying from small airstrips near the principle forts, the work of the Levies would have been almost completely nineteenth-century in character. Besides enforcing the law, the RAF had its full share of humanitarian missions in these primitive areas. In the Hadramaut, where the threat of famine was always at hand, the airmen specialized in food drops. In 1949, an especially severe famine was alleviated by quick RAF action. During the same time, pilots were supporting the Levies against Yemini incursions, and within six years were directing air attacks against the same Hadramaut tribes, who had decided to resist the inroads of the modern world. This 1955 incident grew out of efforts by the government to alleviate local food shortages

resulting from spotty droughts. Trucks were brought in to distribute foodstuffs more efficiently than the prevailing camel system. When times became more prosperous, government laws continued to support the trucks and began to threaten the very livelihood of the camelmen. Saeed Benahim Adhrami, chief of the powerful Sumaa tribe, began to burn back trucks travelling through his territory. Finally, in the last week of June, 1955, the issue came to a head when his men blocked the main road with boulders and proceeded to surround a 90-man patrol of Qaiti State troops sent to investigate. The tribesmen kept the patrol besieged for a full week before a British-led force from Mukalla linked up on June 30. A fierce engagement ensued, with RAF fighters driving the tribesmen from their barricades. The tribal leaders took the first opportunity to beg forgiveness and hurried to renew their pledges of loyalty to the Qaiti sultan.<sup>11</sup>

A year earlier the sharp increase in shooting incidents in the Western Protectorate had started a trend that served to obscure somewhat the serious nature of the affair of the camelmen and the truckers in the East. Though the pressure of Yemeni propaganda was partially to blame for the incidents, the spreading disturbances followed the traditional pattern. After enduring two weeks of constant sniping, the Desert Locust Control unit was forced to withdraw from the Dathina area. Then, within thirty-five miles of Aden town, four shots were

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<sup>11</sup>LT, June 22, 1955, p. 9; LT, June 30, 1955, p. 10; also, The New York Times, June 22, 1955, p. 4; this newspaper hereinafter cited as NYT.

fired (without effect) at members of the Abyan Development Board, who with their wives, were just sitting down to dinner.

The news coming from the northern states was even more alarming. The Levias, carrying out routine resupply details, were taking casualties as ambushes sprang up. The dreary job of taking provisions and replacements from the airstrip at Fort Ataq to Robet and lesser posts suddenly became a hazardous one. After one patrol lost three dead and a like number wounded, movements between Ataq and Robet were limited to days when RAF Vampire jet fighter-bombers could provide air cover. Late in December of 1954, it was reported that, for five months, almost daily sorties over Upper Aulaqi had been directed against wells, roads and cultivated areas. These jet strikes were designed to deny the enemy--thought to be disaffected elements of two tribes--the use of 100 square miles of territory. The goal of the RAF was to drive the dissidents into areas where they could be more easily controlled. However, as in other instances where the air arm alone was used against fairly serious and widespread disturbances, evidence points to limited success at best.<sup>12</sup> The problems of policing the Protectorate began to loom larger.

## 2. British Ground Troops

The summer of 1955 saw the Ataq area become even more of a trouble spot. Ambushes continued, and combined with the Qeiti disturbance and increased Yemeni pressure along the border to draw British ground forces

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<sup>12</sup>NYT, December 23, 1954, p. 3.

to the Protectorate. The commanders Air and Land Forces, Middle East, visited early Aden early in the summer, and in July the infantry began to arrive. Airlifted from the Suez Canal Zone, the force totalled 1,000 men of the Life Guards and 1st Battalion, Seaforth Highlanders. Within a week of their arrival, most of the men were in action. On the week end of July 9-10 a composite force under Lt. Col. J. A. Robertson of the Seaforths, preceded by RAF jets and 3 Lincoln bombers, relieved a siege at Fort Khauri and opened the Mafidh road. Two days later, British jets, automatic weapons and mortars supported three squadrons of Levies in an attack on the mountain stronghold of the Shamsi tribes near Robet. Casualties were inflicted on the enemy, whose retreat was hurried from the air, and the operation was deemed a success. New Ferret scout cars proved useful and before leaving Aden the Life Guards instructed the RAF regiment in the operation of these highly-mobile machines.

British discipline and firepower made an impression on the tribes, though on the government side some pointed to the fact that it had taken a year and a half to chastise 200 dissident riflemen.<sup>13</sup> The worst incident of the year, an ambush of a Rohat convoy in which two RAF officers and 8 of their Levies were killed, had occurred before British ground forces arrived. Now, for some time, comparative peace was had, though RAF and ground forces were kept busy parrying the border probes from Yemen. Petrols and resupply columns still encountered sniper fire, and occasionally lost men.

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<sup>13</sup>LT, July 2, 1955, p. 6; LT, July 12, 1955, p. 6; LT, July 18, 1955, p. 9.



Early in 1957, Venom jets flew 8 sorties to break up an ambush on the main Aden Dhale road. British troops were by this time carrying their share of internal security patrols, and dissident Asraqi tribesmen accounted for the first British fatality in over a year. On February 4, 1957, a 22-man patrol of the Cameron Highlanders left the remote post at Dijibul for the short, rugged march to Dhale. Piped out of the post to the strains of "Scotland the Brave" and "Cameron Men," the patrol had just begun to ascend a 1,000-foot path over a steep pass, when, at 2:00 p.m., a volley dropped the lead men. When the piper and major commanding fell, privates took over and returned the fire. One National Serviceman, mortally wounded, fired several rounds before he died. The attackers probably numbered no more than fifteen; the shooting lasted no more than 30 seconds. Total casualties were 2 dead, 2 seriously wounded and 4 slightly wounded. Since the mountainous terrain prevented the use of the patrol's walkie-talkies, a lieutenant and one man slipped through the 6 miles to Dhale. A relief column of Highlanders arrived at 4:45, having been held up for 10 minutes by rifle fire. They were followed by a force of Levies which were used to picket the road. The wounded could not be carried to Dhale; instead, they were taken back one-half mile to a mud house; this took two hours. The following morning (February 5) a helicopter arrived and in three trips took the wounded and dead to Dhale airfield. They were then taken by RAF Pembroke to Aden.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>LT, February 6, 1957, p. 8; also, NYT, February 6, 1957, p. 11.

While this patrol action was more deadly than most, it was fairly typical of innumerable ambushes. It is very clear that air action could not replace patrols, and that it could not prevent ambushes and casualties. Techniques of communications and casualty evacuation have improved steadily. However, they will always be difficult in country that has been described as "a guerrilla fighters paradise."<sup>15</sup>

### III. THE YEMENI BORDER

Throughout the rule of the Imam Ahmad of Yemen (1948-1962) there were disputes and fighting along the border between Yemen and the Protectorate. It was clear that the Imam interpreted the status quo agreements of the Treaty of Sanaa (1934) in a different manner than did the British. Viewing the Protectorate as a temporary sphere of influence for the British, Ahmad felt that the treaty would restrain them from further rearrangement of the various states. The British interpretation was that a fairly effective border-line had been drawn. Only the final demarcation of a few areas was considered a point for discussion.

Continuous since 1949, Yemeni border actions moved out of the hit-and-run class only after Britain's humiliation at Suez in 1956. Beihan state in the Western Protectorate, forming a mild sultanate into Yemen, was a traditional target. In July of 1949, the Sharif of Beihan set his men to building a customs house three miles within the accepted border with Yemen. For two months, snipers harried construction parties

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<sup>15</sup>LT, January 21, 1957, p. 6.

and finally the place was occupied by Yemeni riflemen. Using an old strategem, Imam Ahmad built a fort one mile to the west, thus reinforcing his claim to the area. Beiham asked for British help, and, on September 2, RAF bombers destroyed the Imam's fort while an attack by Levies reclaimed the customs house. Warning leaflets had preceded the bombs, and only one Yemeni was wounded in the withdrawal.<sup>16</sup>

The next incident of any consequence occurred in 1954, when the Imam, to express his concern for the internal affairs of Lahaj state, sent his forces across the border along the 10,000-foot Mukheiras plateau. These riflemen, numbering over 400, quickly surrounded a 20-man government guards post, that was, however, able to summon help by radio. The RAF, already busy with the Upper Aulaqi revolt, managed to supply air cover for a strong force of Levies that chased the Yemenis back across the border in a running fight that lasted 8 hours.<sup>17</sup>

#### 1. After Suez

The Suez debacle in the autumn of 1956 caused British prestige to plummet in the Middle East. British power appeared, to the Imam of Yemen and to others, to be more vulnerable in South Arabia than it actually was. At the very time that internal troubles brought increasing commitment of British ground units to the Protectorate, the Imam made his most sustained effort to force the border issue by arms.

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<sup>16</sup>NYT, September 10, 1949, p. 29; NYT, September 11, 1949, p. 3; NYT, September 13, 1949, p. 16.

<sup>17</sup>NYT, December 23, 1954, p. 3.

In December of 1956, he sent his regulars and irregulars into the protected border states and the resulting clashes, though tiny, were large by South Arabian frontier standards.

The Yemeni forces persisted in their attacks and the British soon realized that the probes were more serious than the usual hit-and-run. The two main Yemeni drives--from Harib into Beihan state and from Qetabe into the Dhale area--were initially successful against the Aden Protectorate Levies that served as border police. By January 14, 1957, the Yemenis had occupied a salient in Beihan that was about 6 miles deep and 10 miles wide. Some Beihani tribesmen, long the targets of bribes from the Yemen, joined the invaders.<sup>18</sup>

As the attacks on the Levies and tribal guards became more widespread, Air Vice Marshal G. L. Sinclair, commanding the British and Protectorate forces in South Arabia, prepared for more of what he termed "military tiddleywinks."<sup>19</sup> Two platoons of the Durham Light Infantry moved to secure the Manawe road to the north. Firing around the Beihan salient intensified but continued to be inaccurate. A reinforced company of the Cameroun Highlanders, numbering 200 men, joined two companies of the Levies and about 250 tribal guards in containing the drive into Beihan. Two machine gun sections were moved up and fire fights developed (January 12-14, 1957). The actions continued to follow a singularly Arabian pattern, with great amounts of ammunition being expended with very little

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<sup>18</sup>LT, January 15, 1957, p. 6.

<sup>19</sup>LT, January 21, 1957, p. 6.

affect. Five armored cars did sustain hits, but only one Briton and five of the Levies sustained wounds serious enough to report. The men from the Yemen continued to hold on to the villages of Hadhiya and Sawdaniya, though a company of Levies drove a force of 300 Yemenis back across the border near Ghania.<sup>20</sup>

The doughty Sharif Hussein bin Ahmed Am Muhsin of Reihan, who had seen Yemeni incursions under his father's rule, claimed that the Yemenis were massing 4,000 men at Harib and that British support was insufficient. The RAF jets were over the area but took no part in the early actions. Said the Sharif: "They fly over once a day and then go back to Aden and drink tea."<sup>21</sup>

Meanwhile, on January 26, the Imam of Yemen was opening his country to a group of British, American, and Swiss newsmen so that they might watch "British aggression and brutality" in action near the Qataba post. The local Yemeni official, the Naib of Ibb, staged a battle by sending his men to occupy some old British foxholes on a ridge that the British recognized as the borderline. The Imam had never attempted to tax the land south of the ridge but claimed that the British were forcibly occupying the area. Later he would admonish the ten newsmen to tell the truth; however, their reports did not provide much support for his claims to the area. To the newsmen, the action of January 27, 1957, seemed to be "more like a skeet match than an act of war."<sup>22</sup> Yemeni

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<sup>20</sup>NTT, January 24, 1957, p. 1.

<sup>21</sup>NTT, January 24, 1957, p. 1.

<sup>22</sup>NTT, January 29, 1957, p. 2.

tribesmen and regulars alike were armed with a motley array of rifles. Bugles were used to communicate orders and a constant stream of men were seen moving to and from Qatabe where the officials were handing out ammunition. The British, for their part, marked their own field of fire with smoke shells. Few of their mortar rounds fell on the Yemeni side of the border; most hit on the ridge itself. Two Ferret scout cars maneuvered on the British front. A pair of Venom jets made dummy passes on the Yemeni positions and a four-engined Shackleton droned high overhead. Finally, the British formed into a column and departed in a cloud of dust, having made no attempt to storm the ridge and having inflicted a few casualties on those Yemenis who refused to take cover.<sup>23</sup>

Later, in Aden, five of the newsmen reported to the British commander, Sinclair, that they had seen RAF planes fly over and behind Qatabe. Sinclair stated that he had ordered a 600-yard cushion observed at the border, and that he would start a board of inquiry. It was found that a small part of the Yemeni charges were true. British aircraft had violated Yemeni air space, but had not, as was claimed, terrorized the population. Neither had British forces fired 200 mortar shells into a village in Yemen. Certain damaged houses shown reporters were, upon closer scrutiny, found to be left over from RAF air action in 1925! The British had been most careful to put a least on their firepower. As Sinclair was to state: "It may have seemed like a funny battle. But we could have killed a

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<sup>23</sup>NYT, January 29, 1957, p. 2.

lot of people and it would have been within the rules."<sup>24</sup>

In the following month, February of 1957, British air action was directed against the Beihan salient. Venoms flew 14 sorties in support of ground operations on the first two days of the month. The villages of Hadhiya and Samdaniya were recaptured the next day. Meteor reconnaissance aircraft flew 3 sorties, and four-engined Shackletons provided a radio link between the ground and the Venoms. No fatalities were recorded on the British side.<sup>25</sup>

Soon modern military equipment began to arrive in Yemen from the Communist countries, though very little of it appeared in the border skirmishes with Protectorate forces during the next few years. After a Republic was declared in Yemen, and civil war broke out, fights between the two factions often took place near the border with the Protectorate, though direct border violations decreased in number. The most serious threats to the security of South Arabian states came to be internal revolts, outwardly traditional in form, but intensified by the addition of modern weapons and trained leadership from the outside.

#### IV. MUSCAT AND OMAN

In the summer of 1957 attention was focused on Muscat and Oman, where the former Imam of Oman and his brother were staging a revolt against the Sultan of Muscat. A strong force of rebels had suddenly appeared around the ancient Imamate capital of Nizwa. Earlier, in

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<sup>24</sup>NYT, February 5, 1957, p. 4.

<sup>25</sup>LT, February 4, 1957, p. 8.

March, the Sultan's best fighting unit, the Oman Regiment, had been called to the area to put down a short-lived local revolt. Now, the Sultan's men, though led by retired Britons and seconded Pakistanis, proved no match for rebels armed with automatic weapons and land mines. The retreat of the Oman Regiment from the area quickly turned into a debacle. On July 16, 1957, the Sultan appealed to the British for help.

Britain assured the Sultan that aid would be made available. He was a friendly ruler and Britain had a stake in the Persian Gulf area. The campaign that followed was carefully planned and executed by professionals. It met with less than complete success because the old, traditional techniques were at first used. Along with some overly-cautious political advisors, this allowed the Omani revolt to continue to exist for several months. Arab nationalists had plenty of time to exploit the incident for propaganda purposes, something the British hoped to avoid. The political factors surrounding the campaign were admittedly complex, but British planning and tactics seemed unnecessarily slow, exposing a failure on their part to develop new approaches to the military problems involved.

It was not until July 24 that elements of the 1st Battalion, Cameron Highlanders, were beginning to be airlifted from Gilgil, Kenya, to Sharjah in the Trucial States. The RAF's Beverly, a type of transport plane in service since 1955, was used. Two of these aircraft were at the disposal of Air Vice-Marshal Sinclair in South Arabia, and two more were based in Kenya. These four Beverlys apparently made up the



entire airlift strength in the area, each craft could move 100 equipped Cameromians at a time, and this was adequate. Meanwhile, four Venom jets had been shifted from Aden to Sherjah. On July 24, they attacked the fort at Iski--20 miles from Nizwa--in 12 sorties. Warning leaflets had been dropped 48 hours earlier. Leaflets were used extensively throughout the campaign, and invariably preceded bombing and rocket attacks. Typical leaflets were as follows:

Summary of First Leaflet: Talib, Ghelib and Suleiman bin Hamyar have stirred up trouble to serve their selfish ends. Necessary steps will be taken against them until they obey the Government's orders. As a demonstration aircraft will fire on selected targets after people have been warned to get out. If this is not sufficient further steps will have to be taken to punish the district harbouring the trouble-makers. The remedy is in your hands: turn the traitors out, send your leaders to us and fly our red flag.

Summary of Second Leaflet: Omanis, you have now seen a demonstration of the fire-power of our aircraft. Turn out the traitors to avoid further destruction. Omanis, your trade and prosperity are also in danger. During the last two years I have built you a new road to bring your produce to the sea, you have doctors living among you for the first time, a travelling hospital and the advice of agricultural experts. Above all, you had peace to enable you to go about your lawful business. Now the traitors have come, the road is blocked. Trade is interrupted and every man goes in fear of his neighbor. Turn out the traitors and we will resume together the march towards progress and prosperity in peace and security.

Summary of Warning Leaflet: The Sultan of Muscat and Oman issues a warning that your fortresses will be attacked by aircraft the day after tomorrow. The object of the attack is not to destroy but to demonstrate that we have effective powerful weapons.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Great Britain, Parliament, House of Commons, Debates (Hansard), 574; 870-877.

To the north, the Truciel Oman Scouts, totalling about 1,000 men, had a detachment at the Bureimi oasis near the rebel area. One company of Cameraniens had been at Sharjah for five months, and eventually four other companies were flown into Bahrain. On July 25, after 48 hours' warning had been given, Venoms flew 12 sorties against the fort at Mizwa itself, expending 48 rockets and some 7,000 rounds from their cannons. At Sharjah, the RAF had concentrated some transports, 12 Venoms, a Sheekleton and a Canberra. As the air demonstrations continued, some field officers grew restless. An officer of the Truciel Oman Scouts declared that his men could be in Mizwa in 24 hours "if the socialists would let us."<sup>27</sup>

The torrid Omani summer, traditionally a time when warfare was suspended, was at its peak as RAF transports distributed men and equipment for the inevitable land expedition against the ex-Imam and his brother, who had enlisted the support of the self-styled "Lord of the Green Mountains"--the noted Sheikh Suliman ben Hamyar of the Beni Ryan tribe. Another potential ally had been eliminated in the March revolt. Shaikh Ibrahim bin Issa el Hartha had found that 70 men were too few to raise revolt and had given himself up to the Sultan's forces. Forgetting to secure safe conduct for his person, he was immediately thrown in Muscat jail. Later it was learned that Ibrahim's revolt had been timed to coincide with that of the ex-Imam and his brother. Bad luck had ruled out a

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<sup>27</sup>LT, July 26, 1957, p. 10.

link-up at the appointed time in the spring.<sup>28</sup>

Now, on July 26, Sinclair and his staff flew over the rebel area in a Shackleton. It was thought that the rebels held a 25 by 15 mile area around Nizwe, but air reconnaissance had been unable to determine exact rebel positions. The Highlanders, reinforced by machine-gun and mortar sections, moved by truck (July 29-30) to Bureimi--150 miles from Nizwe. Venoms continued to attack forts in rebel territory, as well as vehicles. This meant, for the most part, tearing up abandoned oil rigs of the Iraqi Petroleum Company; or, at best, the American convertible in which the "Lord of the Green Mountains" had emerged from his stronghold in 1955 to pay homage to the Sultan.<sup>29</sup>

Newsman grew annoyed at the seemingly deliberate misinformation they were given by the British command. Preparations for a land expedition were too obvious to be concealed, and the cause for the confusion probably went deeper. When it became clear that air demonstrations alone would not suffice to break the revolt, the British overcompensated by building up a very large task force. As it turned out, a strong force was needed. However, the Nizwe column, as constituted, was a strong composite force that proved to be unsuited to the task of finishing the revolt. Several British units were added for stiffening, but they were neither trained

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<sup>28</sup>D. de C. Smiley, "Muscat and Oman," Journal of the Royal United Service Institution. 105:617 (June, 1966), p. 32; hereinafter cited as Smiley.

<sup>29</sup>LT, July 30, 1957, p. 8; LT, July 31, 1957, p. 8; LT, August 6, 1957, p. 6.

nor equipped to fight the three ringleaders in their home mountains. Too many British troops were used for the job they were allowed to do. Always they had to play a supporting role to the Sultan's forces, for political reasons.

Statements by British commanders seemed to have been merely descriptive, and were to the effect that they were following a careful escalation from (1) demonstrations, to (2) restrictions of rebel movements, to (3) ground action. Unnecessary hesitation on the part of policy makers explained to some extent the slow progress being made in combatting the revolt. The problem of providing logistical support for a large force of motorized European infantry added length to the campaign.

On August 4, the revolt was thought to be spreading to the populous Sharqiya valley, 75 miles from Niswa. A Shakleton was hit by two bullets, and four more Venoms were brought into action. Farret scout cars arrived from Adan and the Trucial Oman Scouts occupied Ibri, just 60 miles from Niswa. Air Vice-Marshal Sinclair stressed that speed was essential. A veteran of composite forces in the Protectorate, Brigadier J. A. Robertson, was named to command the land expedition, which was to be accompanied by four newsmen. Lt. General Sir Geoffrey Bourne, C-in-C Land Forces, Middle East, went to confer with the Imperial Staff. In the Gulf of Oman, three Royal Navy frigates were stationed where two months before a large arms smuggling ring had been broken. At the same time, elements of the King's Own Shropshire Light Infantry were arriving to replace the

Highlanders. The Nizwa expedition finally began to roll on August 8.<sup>30</sup>

#### 1. The Nizwa Campaign

With much secrecy, a mixed force had been collected at Fahud, 80 miles southwest of Nizwa, and the Sultan of Muscat was quick to laud the RAF for its achievement in the field of logistics. Named for a colonel of Scouts, "Carter Force" was spearheaded by one of the Sultan's regiments which had been reconstituted to a strength of 200 men. On the other side of the rebel zone, another of the Sultan's regiments slowly made its way into the Wadi Semail, accompanied by 1,000 loyal camelmen, in a move designed to block the rebel's route through the Green Mountains to the sea. As "Carter Force," combining Cameronians, 15th/19th Hussar scout cars, Trucial Oman Scouts and Muscati troops, made its way from Fahud to Iski, and thence from Firs to Nizwa, air cover was controlled by an RAF man in "a little vehicle." Villages were told that the Sultan's forces were approaching; the British were carefully kept to the rear of the column and out of the limelight. Hundreds of loyal tribesmen began to come forward. The rebels had proven to be a nuisance, and the stoppage of trade had caused the price of rice to treble.

A forward airstrip was established between Iski and Firs, and it was at the latter village that the only real fighting occurred for "Carter Force." Two hundred hard-core rebels, dug in across the approaches to Firq, halted the advance of the column on August 9. The

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<sup>30</sup>LT, August 10, 1957, p. 6.



Fig. 5. The Omani interior c. 1959: the area around Niwva.

rebels obviously were well-trained and were able to lay down very accurate and well-directed fire. The three-part column--Muscetis, Cameronians, and Scouts--withdrew six miles to the village of Kersh. By this time, seven Britons were victims of heat exhaustion. The fort at Firq and caves in the surrounding hillsides provided targets for the RAF. Venoms were called in and succeeded in knocking down one of the towers of the fort.

During the night of August 10-11 the Cameronians moved off to climb the valley walls on the right of the column. By morning they were in a position to direct enfilading fire against the rebel positions in a dense grove. The Hussars drove out to cover the rolling country on the left. Little resistance was encountered, probably due to the August 10 bombing raid by a lone Shackleton in which a number of 20-pound anti-personnel bombs were sprinkled over the rebel positions. The dash down the valley and into Nimve the next day proved to be something of an anti-climax.<sup>31</sup>

The rebellion's ringleaders casually repaired to their remote mountain homes around Belet Seit, accompanied by most of their men. For their part, the British decided somewhat prematurely that the rebellion had been terminated. As engineers blew up the strongpoints at Tenuf and Kamah, British ground units prepared to withdraw. Sinclair explained this move by stating that his British forces were neither trained nor equipped for mountain operations, which was true enough. An underlying reason for the premature withdrawal was probably the sensitiveness of

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<sup>31</sup>Watt, p. 41.

the home government to increasingly unfavorable publicity given the expedition in the UN and world press.<sup>32</sup>

Most British soldiers--save some sappers and Hussars who helped re-establish the oil interests--were leaving Oman by August 16, 1957. Air Marshal Sir Hubert Patch, who had helped oversee the campaign, commented that the Army and RAF had been "surprised at the largeness of the transport problems involved."<sup>33</sup> That the aircraft had been worked very hard indeed was admitted when the Highlanders were withdrawn along the oil company road, through the Semail pass to the Muscat coast. Both vehicles and aircraft were saved by the adoption of this course.<sup>34</sup>

The use of aircraft in the campaign came in for discussion. Some held that aircraft should be a last resort and should not be used for preliminary "demonstrations." However, it would seem that the British had made the best use of aircraft in the unclear circumstances of Oman. Their air strikes probably did little physical harm to the rebel force in the early stages, but were successful in keeping most of the population loyal or at least neutral at the time. An Indian doctor who had been in the rebel zone stated that the people there knew that the British would limit their air strikes. He went on to say that an indiscriminate bombing policy would have caused the local tribesmen to turn more quickly

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<sup>32</sup>Smiley, p. 33.

<sup>33</sup>LT, August 9, 1957, p. 6.

<sup>34</sup>LT, August 17, 1957, p. 6.



on the rebels and turn them out.<sup>35</sup> While the point is open to debate, the Indian doctor's suggestion is far from persuasive. To adopt his course would have meant playing clearly into the hands of the propaganda mongers. Small tactical advantage could have been gained, and all-out bombing might have served to alienate the populace as a whole from the Sultan's government.

Perhaps Hanson W. Baldwin, the military analyst, directed the most valid criticisms at the 1957 campaign in Oman. He stated that the power of modern communications were largely ignored by the British, whose slow progress gave their enemies time to make political capital out of a small war. The campaign had a nineteenth-century aura about it. In that century, as Baldwin pointed out, the colonial battles "were over by the time the world's foreign offices knew of the conflicts."<sup>36</sup>

Baldwin held that Oman clearly showed the uselessness of the atomic bomb, and the great limitations inherent in the combat plane. He pointed out that the concept of air control had been shown to be unworkable in Algeria, Malaya and Oman. Combat planes are a threat only to cities, to population complexes. Only ground troops can dominate and police an area, and in the present century, when speed is the key to war and politics, the best solution is a fire brigade of all arms, streamlined to possess both the speed and mobility. The British had attempted to put together a crude fire brigade in Oman, and gained only incompleta

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<sup>35</sup>LT, August 14, 1957, p. 6.

<sup>36</sup>NYT, August 9, 1957, p. 6.

success. They lacked helicopters, para-engineers to prepare emergency airfields, and transports like the American-built C-130, which was designed to operate from rough fields.<sup>37</sup>

These criticisms were significant, but Baldwin's suggestions were hardly realistic for 1957. Still, they pointed up a leg in Western tactical and strategic thinking, as well as the unique problems and possibilities in small wars that are also modern to some extent.

## 2. Epilogue

Mr. Sandys, the British Minister of Defence, supported the techniques of the 1957 campaign, stressing that it had caused a "minimum loss of lives."<sup>38</sup> This was true enough, though if the rebels had maintained their strong positions in front of Firq, the story might have been different. It must be noted that the rebellion in Oman did not end with the taking of Niwve in 1957. This campaign had proved that British troops could fight in the summer heat of Oman, if motor transport was available to move the infantrymen, but had only succeeded in pushing the rebels into even less accessible areas.

As it was, a long stalemate ensued, with the Sultan's forces maintaining a partially effective siege of the rebel village in the Jebel Akhder (Green Mountains). Meanwhile, the British attempted to improve the performance of the Sultan's soldiers by undertaking a program of re-organization. Some of the troops, who were for the most part Baluchis from

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<sup>37</sup>NYT, August 15, 1957, p. 4.

<sup>38</sup>LT, August 15, 1957, p. 8.

the Sultan's South Asian enclave at Gwedur, were formed into the Muscat Scouts. Thirty British officers and ninety British NCO's, some of whom were drawn from the Somaliland Scouts, led the original complement.<sup>39</sup> Early in 1958 Britain's Under-Secretary of State for War arrived for discussions with the Muscat government. In July, an agreement was announced providing for complete reorganization of all the armed forces of the Sultan. Twenty-three British Army officers were immediately seconded, along with five planes and pilots, and other equipment. Later, the Royal Marines contributed one officer and 20 NCO's to the training program.<sup>40</sup>

Still, in June of 1958, the officers under contract to the Sultan, as well as those seconded, agreed that British troops were needed to assault the rebels stronghold and end the disturbance. Vehicles continued to encounter land mines, and lighter land rovers were temporarily withdrawn from use. Finally, a request was made to Britain for at least two battalions of Parachutists or Special Air Servicemen, who alone were considered by the commanders on the spot as fit enough for the rugged operation.<sup>41</sup>

By this time the publicity from the Nimve campaign of 1957 had subsided considerably, and Britain readily gave the go-ahead for an operation by the 22nd Special Air Service Regiment (SAS) that was due

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<sup>39</sup>Wett, p. 41.

<sup>40</sup>Smiley, p. 33-36.

<sup>41</sup>Smiley, p. 37.

to return very shortly from Malaya. In October, therefore, the 80 men of D Squadron SAS began patrols and acclimatization in Oman. It soon became apparent that another squadron was needed, and A Squadron was flown in on January 12, 1959, as final plans were being made for the assault. The SAS was committed for only three months, and action would have to come before April.<sup>42</sup>

The area for the assault was chosen--a trackless, unguarded slope--and air support marshalled. Two helicopters were stationed at Nimwa to carry casualties out to a field hospital there. Number 8 Venom Squadron was on call, along with transports at Bahrain. Donkeys would be the vehicles of resupply if bad weather stopped supply aircraft from getting through. Several diversionary probes were carried out by the Sultan's forces. One Venom was lost accidentally when the pilot failed to pull out of a dive on a strafing mission and crashed to his death on the Jabal. The "voice" Pembroke, used to broadcast propaganda to both rebels and friends, lost one of its two engines to rifle fire but landed safely, and was later used for reconnaissance by the SAS commanders.

Later on D-Day, January 25, 1959, the two SAS squadrons pushed off on the first leg of their assault. After nine and one-half hours of hard climbing up the face of the Jabal, and a two-hour march across a rocky col, the SAS halted to await heavy supplies on the morning of D plus 1. The second part of the assault consisted of nine supply drops, of 3,000 pounds each, by three RAF Valiants flying from Bahrain. These

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<sup>42</sup>Smiley, p. 38.

drops proved doubly helpful in the final phase of the assault on the outmaneuvered rebels, whose followers mistook the chutes for a paratroop landing. When the rebel forces began to melt away from the stronghold, only the landing elements of the SAS came under fire. A bullet hit and exploded a grenade in one SAS man's pack and three men were severely wounded. Two were dead within 24 hours even though helicopters had been used to evacuate them. Almost immediately after the successful conclusion of the operations on the Jebel, the SAS was flying home to Britain in RAF Beverly transports.

Once again the three rebel leaders managed to slip away, only to reappear in Saudi Arabia and Cairo where an Omani Imamate was maintained. Captured letters pointed to the Saudis as the original troublemakers. The Imam's brother, Talib, had gained their support in 1956. He enlisted 500 Omanis from among the oil field workers and was provided with Saudi training facilities at Dammam. After seven months' training most of the rebels were directed to their homes in the Omani interior. Talib, with 70-80 hard-core followers, was delayed some weeks when his boat broke down, but finally managed to slip ashore in Oman and make his way into the Green Mountains. There he linked up with dissidents of several tribes and with the other trained men who were each provided with a rifle and 200 rounds of ammunition. Some .50-caliber Browning automatic weapons and scores of cheap but effective land mines had also been provided.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>LT, August, 17, 1957, p. 6; also, Smiley, p. 32.

The liberal aid given one faction in an internal struggle, and the ability of a determined group of conspirators to elude detection by the Royal Navy were a reminder that it was really only the coldness of the local population that caused the failure of Telib's scheme. British troops had once more proved that they could fight well in South Arabia. The advantages derived from having an elite, airlifted fire brigade that could shift from operations in Malaya to those in the harsh winter of the Green Mountains, were obvious.

#### V. THE RADFAN

As Sir Charles Johnston, Governor of Aden from 1960 to 1962, guided the states toward a Federation of South Arabia in fact as well as in form, the Yemen was shaken by republican revolution and civil war. Egypt and Saudi Arabia confronted each other as they backed rival factions in the Yemen. Though the Yemen Republic renewed the Imam's claim to "South Yemen," and was supported by several thousand Egyptian troops, the architects of the Federation proceeded calmly. On November 29, 1960, the Aden Protectorate Levies had officially become the Army of the Federation. As nationalist sentiments rose, especially in urban Aden Colony, the British announced in 1964 that independence would be given not later than 1968. In the meantime, the Federal Army and state guards were paid and officered by Britain. Federation forces were still at the disposal of the British officer commanding Land Forces in the Middle East. Britain continued to meet the cost of the defense establishment, from partial subsidies to tribal guards to the cost of the Mukalla Regulars

and the Hadhrami Beduoin Legion in the Protectorate, as well as the costs of the large RAF establishment in Aden.

To the north of Aden, the mountainous area known as the Radfan continued to be a prime trouble spot. In the late 1950's the British had forced out the Sultan of Lahaj who opposed them--he exiled himself to Egypt--and put in their own men. Lahaj and the Radfan continued to be of importance to the British, and during the greater part of 1964 British and Federal troops campaigned in the Radfan in order to keep vital road communication open with the north. During the same period, the RAF faced adverse world opinion when it retaliated to 52 shooting incidents along the Yemeni border. Hunter jets hit the fort at Harib after 15 minutes warning had been given. Federal troops patrolled the border and attempted to stop the smuggling of land mines from the Yemen. A fighter patrol was flown near the border to counter similar demonstrations by the pilots of Egyptian MIG's.

When the traditionally dissident tribesmen of the Radfan were found to have mortars, automatic weapons and portable radios, the British took action to break the power of the "Red Wolves of the Radfan." The first week of May, 1964, saw 600 men of the King's Own Scottish Borderers airlifted from England, an operation that took only two days. A battalion of the First Lancashire Fusiliers was put on 24-hours notice in England. But the bulk of the fighting to keep the Aden-Dhala road open was done by elite Royal Marine and paratroop units, supported by Federal troops in whose ranks native Arab officers were beginning to appear; further support was provided by an East Anglian battalion released for duty when the

Borderers arrived in Aden.

The tribesmen had built concrete emplacements overlooking the Dhala road. Royal Marine Commandos pushed out from the airfield at Thumair and the 3rd Battalion, Parachute Regiment lost 2 dead and 10 wounded in early action. A captain and a private were missing; it was not until two weeks later that a patrol found that the tribesmen had beheaded both men. Though the UN Special Committee voted 18-3 to censure Britain for her use of modern weapons against tribesmen, Prime Minister Douglas-Home stated that the ground troops would continue to get the "air cover they need."<sup>44</sup>

Three peaks dominated the Dhala road. After several days of hard fighting, two peaks--code names Coca Cola and Cap Bedge--were taken by the Parachutists and the East Anglians. Engineers set to work, blasting a road through Wadi Buran into tribal country. The troops were supplied by helicopters whenever highland winds permitted.<sup>45</sup> All three peaks were taken by May 8, and continuous pressure was kept on the tribesmen. The next day a Shackleton dropped 14 1,000-pound bombs on positions held by the Quteibi and Ibdali tribes, the strongest in the Radfan.<sup>46</sup> The field force, commanded by Brigadier Hugh Blacker, swelled to 3,000 men. Two companies of Parachutists climbed a 4,000-foot ridge at night and outflanked the tribesmen. Then, on the morning of May 21, they

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<sup>44</sup>NYT, May 12, 1964, p. 3.

<sup>45</sup>NYT, May 6, 1964, p. 1.

<sup>46</sup>NYT, May 10, 1964, p. 3.



cleared an enemy village, capturing seven of the enemy and the tribal cattle herds. These parcs were led by Korean War hero Lt. Colonel Tony Farrer-Hockley who instructed his men: "If you're fired on, give 'em all hell. But I don't want to see you bursting into buildings and spraying the place with bullets like something in an American movie."<sup>47</sup>

Hunter fighter-bombers of the RAF continued to use rockets and cannon against the tribesmen, and 105 mm howitzers were firing at extreme range of about three miles. But the final defeat of the "Red Wolves" came only after British Marines used ropes to climb the 2,000 foot Arnold Spur, thus showing the tribesmen, as Blacker was to put it, that the troops could follow them anywhere.<sup>48</sup>

## VI. SOUTH ARABIA AND THE WEST

After 1964, Britain held a fire brigade in South Arabia. Normally, this meant a Royal Marine Commando and a squadron of the RAF Regiment. Tactical air commands operated from Aden and Bahrain. Since 1963, the Middle East was provided with its own unified command structure, usually with a RAF air marshal as Commander-in-Chief. An air vice-marshal, a major general and a rear admiral acted as assistants.

The elaborate air and naval bases at Aden provided a base for strategic bombers as well as for security operations in South Arabia and the Persian Gulf. To insure the progress of the Federation as a

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<sup>47</sup>NYT, May 22, 1964, p. 2.

<sup>48</sup>NYT, May 27, 1964, p. 11.

stable political unit the United Kingdom, in the years 1956-1961, made grants of some 5.5 million and loans of around another 1 million. A further 5,694,000 went for direct services, including local military forces.<sup>49</sup> To judge whether these expenditures were successful one must wait for the independence of the Federation of South Arabia. If it is able to become a force for international law and order in the area,<sup>50</sup> the uses made of British manpower and wealth in the states will have justified. Much depends on the conduct of the Federal Army, whose six veteran infantry battalions were raised to nine and augmented by Artillery and aircraft during the last years of British rule.

An Emergency was declared in Aden Colony late in 1963, and the situation steadily worsened as rival nationalist political groups sought to destroy each other and to undermine what was left of British influence. Incidents of terrorism increased from 36 in 1964, to 286 in 1965 and 510 in 1966. During these three years terrorists killed 86 and wounded 806 persons.<sup>51</sup> To avert anarchy after independence is declared, the Federal Army will have to show not only that it is no longer an arm of British imperialism, but that it is an effective military force, capable of maintaining security. As representatives of a native government, the

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<sup>49</sup>Gillian King, Imperial Outpost--Aden. London: Oxford University Press, 1964, pp. 21 and 74.

<sup>50</sup>J. B. Kelly, Reviews of Johnson, Charles Hepburn, The View from Steamer Point, and King, Gillian, Imperial Outpost--Aden; in Middle Eastern Studies 2:2 (January, 1966), p. 70.

<sup>51</sup>The Kansas City Times, March 16, 1967, p. 2D.

Federal soldiers, in some instances at least, will have broader opportunities when dealing with the population. In the areas where any government at all is viewed as anathema, it is likely that the Federal Army will have to prove itself again and again.

Western planners, as long as the West has an interest in the oil and the stability of the South Arabian states, must be aware of the precedents and conditions affecting war in the area. It is not at all improbable that Western forces may be called to the aid of friendly governments and be asked to undertake limited actions not unlike those of the British. Some, but not all of the strategic purposes of the West may be served by the presence of rocket-firing nuclear submarines cruising in the Indian Ocean. Therefore, Western commanders, as well as those of the Federal Army, should be aware of requirements for security operations in South Arabia, as they were revealed in the operations under British rule.

First, there is the need for well-trained, locally-based forces of the Levy pattern. Constant patrolling must be undertaken, to insure contact with the people and promote law and order. This will also guard against extensive inroads or buildups by guerrillas. Sufficient air strength, for purposes of resupply and ground support, should be provided.

Secondly, attention must be given to the peculiarities of climate and topography present in South Arabia. Extreme variations are often found in a small area. The effect of logistics, morale, and maintenance must be calculated whenever operations are planned for deserts or for mountains ranging up to 10,000 feet. The necessity of acclimatizing

troops to the various areas is another for locally based, though air-supported, native troops.

Thirdly, there is the fact that the fire-brigade concept, with some modifications, is useful to both the governments of the West and that of the Federation. The number of elite troops need not be large, but the factors of communication, mobility, supply and inter-service cooperation must be stressed. Ideally, the elite squadrons would be able to operate and exist on their own if conditions put a stop to air operations. For the Western powers, the commando carrier, acting as a core for light naval escort and landing craft, and making use of helicopters and reconnaissance aircraft, would be worthy of study. Though sand storms and related phenomena put a limit on the helicopter's use in some areas, it would seem to be an extremely valuable addition to any fire brigade.

Fourthly, the use of modern ground support aircraft would be examined thoroughly, in relation to unique southern Arabian conditions. Aircraft have probably lost their novelty, if indeed they ever had any, for the tribesmen. However, they seem to be useful, not as purely offensive weapons, but as symbols of the determination of the central government or of the protecting power, and as such may be profitably employed to keep the general population loyal or at least not openly rebellious. The use of air strikes to support infantry drives depends on the nature of the enemy and the terrain, to a large extent, for success. At best, the caves and steep valley walls of many South Arabian areas make such fighter-bombing difficult.

These, then, are some lessons drawn from a superficial study of the operations in South Arabia, and it is probably that the ideas, as well as the technique by which they were derived, will continue to be of use in an area of the world where the basic determinants of action change only very slowly.

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AL POWER IN THE ADEN PROTECTORATE

by

JAMES GILBERT ALLEN

B. A., Drury College, 1966

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AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of History

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY  
Manhattan, Kansas

1968

This report describes the military how of the last years of British presence in South Arabia, rather than the political why.

Britain became a land power in the Middle East to protect the routes to India, and later secured influence over oil-producing states in a strategic move to block other European powers. From 1517-1918 the Yemen, the most populous and well-favored area of Arabia was nominally controlled by the Turks. After 1911 Imams of the Zeidi sect gained control and in the 1934 treaty with Britain formal independence. Britain and Yemen agreed to maintain the status quo along the borders, but clashed over interpretation of the phrase.

The protected states of the Aden Protectorate provided a buffer for the important British base at Aden. In 1959 the British began to group the tiny states into a Federation and allowed some representative government in Aden Colony. In rugged Muscat and Oman to the east, the Sultan's power was challenged by Imam Ghalib (1954- ) after years of peace following the mysterious Treaty of Sib (1920) which gave the Iman power in the Omani interior.

Britain became a Protecting Power in the Trucial States to suppress piracy and secure trade. In an area of many tiny sheikdoms modernization came slowly and British-led forces had to continually guard against border incursions. Local dissidents were always a problem in protected tribal areas. After 1945 foreign assistance to internal revolts provided a more serious problem. After the 1914-1918 War Britain adopted a system combining RAF aircraft with Levy forces to police the protected tribal areas. Aircraft combatted droughts as well as supplied garrisons in the

Protectorate. British ground troops were committed in the 1950's as disturbances multiplied, though R&P control was retained. Continuous patrolling was necessary in the tribal areas even though modern ground support aircraft were used extensively.

In the late 1950's Yemen made major incursions into the Protectorate. British and native troops, supported by jets, used their firepower sparingly. In Oman (1957) the Sultan's troops were bested by rebels with modern weapons and training supplied by the Saudis. Slowly, a British composite force moved into the interior using traditional methods. British forces were unsuited to finishing the rebellion in the mountains, and were withdrawn. Aircraft were only effective in presenting a government presence to the populace. Finally, in 1959, elite Special Air Service Squadrons, supplied by air from Bahrain, took the rebel stronghold.

When it was found that the tribesmen of the Radfan mountains north of Aden possessed modern weapons, British and Levy forces cleared the major roads in a 1964 campaign that saw extensive use of artillery and air support, but most notably of elite units in the necessary elimination of traditional tribal strongholds.

Nuclear submarines cannot protect all of the interests of the West in South Arabia, and lessons from the British campaigns may be important to the West as well as to the security forces of the newly independent Federation. First, well-trained, locally-based levy-type forces are necessary. Patrolling promotes law and order and guards against guerrillas. Secondly, the extremes of topography and climate in a small area must be noted in planning operations in desert and mountains.

Thirdly, the composite ~~line~~-brigade force, including elite infantry supplied by air, and provided with inter-service cooperation and adequate communication, would be useful for the harder jobs. Commando carriers could be used by the West. Fourthly, direct air support must be studied, as it has appeared to have limited, special, uses in South Arabian conditions.